

Under the Conditions

by

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Cast of Characters

JANE: 48

ALTON: 48

Place
Alton's home

Time
Morning

Setting: The play takes place inside the very large and polished home of Alton. There's open space in the living room with a veranda attached and the ocean can not only be seen but heard in the nearby distance.

At Rise: The play opens up on with Alton opening his front door to a well dressed Jane.

JANE: Hi.

ALTON: Hi, come on in.

JANE enters home.

JANE: Spacious living.

ALTON: Plenty of fresh air.

JANE: I would imagine.

ALTON: Something to drink?

JANE: Water.

ALTON: Scotch?

JANE: Water's fine. Gave up the drink.

ALTON: Have you? Ice?

ALTON grabs a bottle of water,
pours some in a glass.

JANE: No. Yes, been sober coming on five years.

ALTON: Make yourself comfortable, sit on the couch, whatever, five years, that's terrific.

JANE: Is it?

ALTON hands JANE ice water.

ALTON: No?

JANE: I guess it is...even though my daughter still left me.

ALTON: She hasn't left you, Jane.

JANE: Alright, I know your game. No need to speak softly to me. I'd rather you just come right out with it Alton and tell me what you need to tell me. And no need for me to stay longer than necessary.

ALTON: It's not necessarily what I want, even though I'd be pleased to take our daughter in...it's what Alyssa wants.

JANE: Isn't she too young to know what she wants?

ALTON: She's coming of age...soon, she'll be going off to college.

JANE: I don't know what I ever did to make her leave me.

ALTON: Jane, I'd wish you'd stop saying that.

JANE: But she did! She took a one way ticket out of here and abandoned her mother. You know how I found out?

ALTON: I know.

JANE: A note! A lousy handwritten note on the refrigerator that said, "Mom, I took a flight out to Dad's, I'm moving in with him." I almost collapsed. I ran directly into her bedroom thinking this was all some sort of cruel joke, but her luggage was gone, her clothes, her make-up...she left the framed photo of her on her bureau and I...it was the time I took her to an outdoor beach concert to...to...we were happy Alton...I stared at that photo remembering what an amazing day we had together, the kind of day that made things feel sealed between a mother and daughter...it was as if she wanted to deliberately slap me in the face with that memory, as if to say, "Ha! Look at us now! We are everything BUT!" (beat) Oh dear...you're the last person I wanted to get upset in front of...out of all people on planet Earth.

ALTON: I'm not so bad.

JANE: Please!

ALTON: We haven't seen one another in quite some time.

JANE: What about it?

ALTON: I'm sure we've both made changes in our lives.

JANE: Apparently not enough.

ALTON: Don't be so hard on yourself.

JANE: That's easy for you to say Alton. You're here! On the other side of the country. Living off the ocean in the sunlight, making a grand living as a writer...it's indisputable.

ALTON: Indisputable?

JANE: The fact that you have an easygoing life. You were always laid back but now, forget it, your blood pressure must be that of a fourteen year old boy.

ALTON: Well, not every day is sunshine and bikinis.

JANE: Bikinis? What are you insinuating?

ALTON: Nothing, it came out wrong.

JANE: You haven't changed all that much after all. I'm not here even five minutes and you're off to the races, aren't you?

ALTON: I didn't mean...I'm single Jane and we've known one another since forever, what is the big deal with me being completely open and honest with you? We're adults aren't we?

JANE: You don't need to be so transparent.

ALTON: Fine. I'll edit out my masculinity.

JANE: Very funny.

ALTON: You know what I mean. Didn't realize you'd take me as rude. Sorry.

JANE: I get your point.

ALTON: Good. All I'm saying is that I have my difficult days just like everybody else. I'm a human being aren't I?

JANE: Most days, I presume.

ALTON: Anyway, Alyssa loves you more than anything or anyone she's ever known.

JANE: Then why did she leave?!

ALTON: Jane, I think it's nothing more than wanting to try something new. She told me she hasn't been happy at school, that you and her can't agree on things...she told me how critical you've been of her.

JANE: Critical?

ALTON: Judgmental.

JANE: Excuse me?

ALTON: I'm telling you what she told me.

JANE: Who else is going to be on her back? I'm her mother for goodness sake.

ALTON: Yes, you are.

JANE: I have rights. I gave birth to her, didn't I? Don't I have a say in how she dresses, puts on makeup, what friends she keeps, the boys she's taking an interest in...I'm not going to leave her to her own devices.

ALTON: Jane, I think you are a wonderful mother.

JANE: Be quiet! I didn't travel here to hear your sympathy symphony.

ALTON: Is that what you think I'm doing?

JANE: You love this, don't you? You relish in the fact that Alyssa chose YOU over ME. After years of bringing her up all alone, she arrived at your doorstep and you took her in without a second's thought.

ALTON: I should hope so, it's my daughter.

JANE: Was it planned?

ALTON: Was what planned?

JANE: This! Her being here.

ALTON: I was just as surprised as you.

JANE: Hmm.

ALTON: Really Jane, I was. To be honest, I never expected Alyssa ever wishing to want to move in with me.

JANE: That makes two of us. Wait! She told you that's what she wanted?

ALTON: You didn't let me get to that.

JANE: What did she say Alton?!

ALTON: Please, calm down...I know this is hard...it's not easy for me, either. I've grown to love my privacy. I like being who I am and if I'm being quite honest here, I'm not so sure that having Alyssa move in with me is going to be the best thing.

JANE: Why's that?

ALTON: Because I love my life.

JANE: You selfish slut.

ALTON: Jane!

JANE: Is that it?

ALTON: Jane, you have no right speaking to me that way.

(beat)

JANE: You're right. You're right....I'm sorry.

ALTON: Okay...can we calm down and focus on what matters? (sighs) Alyssa has expressed her desire to live here...I have a room for her, there's a school near by and I've done a good job imagining her life

ALTON (cont'd): being here with me and how happy I know it would make her...

JANE: What about you?

ALTON: What about me?

JANE: How happy would it make you Alton?

ALTON: ...I don't know...I love our daughter but I'd have to make the adjustment...it won't be easy for me but I'm willing to make the sacrifice if it means Alyssa is happy...I believe I've reached a point or am willing to try to reach the point where I can put someone else's happiness before my own.

JANE (sarcastic): Isn't that sweet?

ALTON: What?

JANE: Don't get me started.

ALTON: I'm willing to try. What more can I say?

JANE: If you fuck this up I will cut your balls off.

ALTON: Jane!

JANE: Alton, our daughter's future is at stake and it will be in your hands and if you fuck that up I will fuck you up. There, I said it. There's no beating around the bush. I've given my soul to this child...and I'm willing to support her need to live here but only under the condition that I know for certain you will give her everything she needs as a father or so help me God I will unleash hell on you.

ALTON: Why do you have to threaten me? I thought we were long past threats.

JANE: Not when it comes to my daughter! Understand?

ALTON: She's my daughter too. You think I would ever do anything to hurt her?

JANE: Alton, not intentionally, that much I know, it's the unintentional that will keep me up nights.

ALTON: I told you I am not the same man I used to be.

JANE: We all change, hopefully it's for the better.

ALTON: It is for the better. Look at me! I stopped using drugs, I have a good career, I own this lovely property and I have many good people I care about that I can call dear friends.

ALTON (cont'd): It's taken me forever to get to this point and only you can imagine what I must have gone through to get here on my own but I did Jane, I did, so give me some credit for once in your life cause I deserve it.

And if I'm going to take on our daughter, which is completely unexpected, well then I do have the right to refuse, but I haven't and I haven't because in my heart I've decided that it's about time I'm there for that kid the way she needs me to be...it's my brain that's catching up, it's my logic and yes selfishness that gives me conflict but my heart's made up and I want nothing more than to be able to spend time with our daughter and get to know her and bond with her because well, I never thought I'd get the chance and here it is...a long time ago I accepted the notion that it would never happen for me, that I would never be a father in the traditional sense, whatever that means but she's here...and I'm willing to take this on...let me.

JANE: That was nice.

ALTON: Was it?

JANE: It was.

ALTON: It's just how I feel, Jane. Don't think I'm not nervous about this...I'd be lying to you if I didn't say I was scared. I don't want to disappoint her...

JANE: You won't.

ALTON: It's my chance to, to do right by my family the way I wish I could have back then.

JANE: Okay.

ALTON: Yeah?

JANE: Welcome to the heartbreak.

ALTON: You think?

JANE: Oh yeah. For sure. This kid will have you climbing walls, you'll find yourself shipped to the nearest zoo but she's an angel...I love her so much...I hope I did a good enough job.

ALTON: I hope I will do half as good a job as you, Jane.

JANE: You better.

ALTON: I promise you, I will.

END OF PLAY